

Center for Veterinary Biologics
Description of Community Networking Sessions
Conducted for the Public Meeting held 9/23-24, 1998

On Wednesday September 23 and Thursday September 24, 1998, the Center for Veterinary Biologics (CVB) held their 8th public meeting at the Scheman Continuing Education Building on the campus of Iowa State University in Ames, IA. The ~260 stakeholder participants at the meeting included ~200 individuals representing ~100 veterinary biologics manufacturing companies. All aspects and sizes of the regulated industry were represented, from applicants to long-established firms, from very large firms (1/4 of licensee participants were from 4 firms) to very small firms (more than 1/2 of licensee participants were from small firms). A wide variety of organizations and businesses were also represented by 60 individuals, including ingredient suppliers, animal owners, veterinarians, and regulators from other countries.

In addition to the traditional format of scientific presentations, questions and answers, and panel discussions, the Center chose to host two separate Community Networking Sessions for meeting participants. Community Networking is a process for getting input from meeting participants in a systematic and fair way and for building public support. This process, developed and performed by McCaffery Associates, is designed to help program managers better manage the flow of critical data coming through their organization from all sources. It is also designed to help managers and executives get a true "flavor" for the thoughts, ideas, and concerns of the *majority* of meeting participants--not just the "squeaky wheels" that have the courage to walk up to a microphone and voice their opinion. These individuals are usually at one extreme or another about a particular topic, and do not give program managers a true or representative view of issues.

The Community Networking Sessions involve breaking up very large groups into a series of much smaller groups (8-10 people maximum) and getting their input on a variety of pre-determined topics. Each small group elects, or has assigned, its own group facilitator, whose job is to ensure that every member of the small group provides input on these topics. A separate group recorder takes discussion notes, and at the end of the small group discussion, summarizes the thoughts of the group. After the small groups meet, multiple small groups reconvene together in an area, and each small group recorder gives a very brief summary of their discussion highlights to the larger group. It is here where program managers or company executives are present to listen to each small group recorder's verbal summary. It is here where managers are able to see themes emerge, and differentiate between true "problems" or needs, and the problems or needs as described by a single individual or very small group of individuals. After each recorder completes his verbal summary, the small group notes are turned into the organization or company for their review.

The topics discussed at this CVB public meeting included:

- Level of confidence in the safety of veterinary biological products;
- Level of confidence in the efficacy of veterinary biological products;
- Level of availability of veterinary biological products;
- General strengths and improvements to make in the CVB testing, inspection, and licensing processes; and
- Recommended areas of focus for CVB in 5 and 10 years.

The first four questions were asked of the attendees divided into small groups with the full diversity of participant backgrounds represented. The last question was asked in a later session of small groups assembled to represent one or another particular background (small firm, large firm, owners, etc.). In each session reporting period a CVB Director and other members of the CVB Management Team attended to hear the group products.

The first document included in this package is a complete typed set of each of the small groups' raw notes from their community networking sessions (37 pages). These are simply a typed version of the handwritten notes turned in by each small group recorder. The only editing that was done involved spelling corrections. If sections of the notes could not be read, the recorders were asked to "translate" them.

The second document in this package is a summary of themes that emerged from the raw notes of each small group, based on a content analysis. Both of these items were completed by Janette Grimes, a program analyst within the Policy and Program Development (PPD) division of APHIS. This analyst has worked with the Center in developing the topics discussed during the Community Networking Sessions, and coordinated with the Center and McCaffery Associates in hosting these sessions.

Ms. Grimes is a general policy analyst, not a scientist, and is not employed with the Center or Veterinary Services within APHIS. She was asked to coordinate these sessions and summarize the small group notes because of her "outsider's" perspective. It was the thinking of the Center Directorate that this would better ensure that all true themes, positive and negative, emerged from the meeting notes, and that no prejudice or bias would play into the summary.

As a result, the following small group notes and general summary may have some slight scientific inaccuracies. They may not also be fully representative of the issues or concerns that the Center Directorate knows exist for the regulated industry and ultimate consumers of veterinary biologics products. They are, however, representative of the discussions that took place at the public meeting in these Community Networking sessions.

The Center management intends to use the input from these sessions to inform the difficult choices it faces in using CVB's limited resources to maximum benefit to animal health. A CVB document distilling and putting the input into context will be forthcoming, followed by a brief CVB response to the concerns and needs expressed. Further input will be sought and analysis performed before a detailed CVB response including an action list for the future is generated and released.

The Center for Veterinary Biologics thanks the participants of the Community Networking Sessions for their openness and hard work in generating the results contained in these reports. Their efforts are expected to result in benefits for all those concerned with animal health products.